# Organic Bulletin

**Spring 2004**

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## Organic Farming (Conversion of Animal Housing) Scheme update

There is high level of interest in the OF(CoAH)S, which opened on 17 December 2003. To date 29 applications have been received. These are in the process of being assessed by the Monthly Assessment Panel, which has issued the first approvals.

Approved works must be completed in sufficient time to allow prior payment inspection, claim and payment processing by 31 March 2005, the final funding date. Funding of £2 million is available.

For those in the process of preparing an application, please note that quotes for work should be on original headed paper, either with the proprietors or an authorised person's original signature, and dated.

Quotes should clearly state whether the cost is inclusive or exclusive of VAT. The firm's VAT registration number should be recorded clearly in manuscript, if not included on the headed paper.


EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
www.dardni.gov.uk

**www.ruralni.gov.uk/bussys/organic/**

## Revised requirements for slurry channels and OF(CoAH)S applications

Anyone intending to submit an application involving a slurry channel under the Organic Farming (Conversion of Animal Housing) Scheme should note that the guidance, which was provided for slurry channel construction in the explanatory booklet, has been revised in accordance with new Department of Environment (DOE) requirements.

These require that the base and walls of any new slurry transfer channel must be impermeable (i.e. comply with BS8007, the water retaining code). In addition, if the new channel connects to an existing tank, any breach in the tank wall must be demonstrated to have caused no detrimental effect to structural stability.

A qualified engineer's report as to the compliance of any channels and the impact of these on any existing tank will be required by both DOE, Environmental and Heritage Service and DARD.

Failure to comply will result in DARD refusing to pay any claim made, and DOE, EHS taking appropriate action under the SSAFO Regulations (The Control of Pollution, (Silage, Slurry and Agricultural Fuel Oil) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003).

Finally, please note that a copy of the supporting engineer's report will be required when making a claim under the terms of the Scheme.

## ACOS

The Advisory Committee for Organic Standards (ACOS) is a non-executive public body which advises UK Ministers on organic standards, approval of organic certifying bodies and organic research and development. It met for the first time on 5 December 2003. The Committee has since met on two further occasions, one of which was an extraordinary meeting to discuss co-existence between organic and GM farming.

The members of ACOS are drawn form all areas of the organic sector, and from across the UK. Mr Rex Humphrey is the Committee member from Northern Ireland.

For further details on ACOS, including minutes of Committee meetings, visit www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/acos/index.htm

## Organic lead group

Work is progressing on the establishment of the Organic Lead Group, as recommended in the strategic action plan contained in Organic Farming in Northern Ireland: A Development Strategy ("Stopes Report"). DARD hopes to be in a position to make appointments to the Group in the coming months. The Group will have a vital role in the implementation of the action plan, which is aimed at the strategic development of the local organic sector.

For further details of the development strategy, visit www.dardni.gov.uk/pr2001/pr010397c.htm

## Sward growth measurement

In conjunction with the Northern Ireland Plant Testing Station, the technologists at Greenmount Campus are examining the feasibility of providing weekly information on grass growth and clover content of a grass/white clover sward to organic farmers via e-mail. If you would be interested in being part of a pilot group receiving this information, please forward your e-mail address to Charlotte Moore at charlotte.moore@dardni.gov.uk

## Environmental impact assessment – do you need one ?

EU Legislation on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has recently been extended to include projects for the *"use of uncultivated land or semi-natural areas for intensive agricultural purposes."*, with DARD responsible for its implementation.

What this means essentially is that if you intend to build on, or bring into cultivation or intensive agricultural use, rough grazing, land that has not been cultivated for many years, semi-natural areas, scrubland or wetland, you must seek permission to do so in order to avoid damaging wildlife rich environments or habitats.

A range of operations is covered by this legislation including drainage, clearance of vegetation and introducing livestock after many years absence.

This could, of course, apply to someone who has recently inherited, purchased or leased a derelict or semi-derelict farm.

Although these are legal requirements with penalties for non-compliance, DARD is not seeking to penalise the farming community but to work with them to ensure a successful environmental outcome.

More information and Guidelines can be found on the DARD web site http://www.dardni.gov.uk/core/dard241a.htm .

There is also a telephone Help-line available on 028 9052 4130. If you are in any doubt or believe you are affected by these regulations you should contact DARD on the help-line number since it is an offence to start work on a project without consent from DARD.

## Organic milk has more Omega 3 fatty acids

New research published by the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research (IGER) in the UK shows that organic milk contained two-thirds more Omega 3 essential fatty acids than ordinary milk.

Most people in the UK are deficient in Omega 3 fatty acids, although they are essential for good health. Omega 3 fatty acids have to be obtained from food as they cannot be produced naturally by the body.

The research, led by Dr Richard Dewhurst found that samples of milk from organic cows contained at least 64% more Omega 3 than conventional milk. Dr Dewhurst said: "Our previous research has shown that milk from cows fed clover can contain up to 240% more Omega 3 fatty acids than milk from cows fed grass and concentrates. Organic dairy farmers feed much higher levels of clover because they use it as an alternative to using synthetic chemical fertilisers to ensure lush pastures."

Nutritionist and State Registered Dietician, Sian Porter added: "Drinking just half a pint a day of organic milk as part of a healthy balanced diet gives a useful additional source of this Omega 3 fatty acid, as it provides approximately 10% of the recommended daily intake (RDI) of essential n-3 fatty acid, alpha-linolenic acid. Eating a matchbox sized piece of organic cheese will give you up to 88% of your RDI of this Omega 3 fatty acid."

Source www.organic-research.com

## Organic Workshop on 'Organic Markets'

An organic workshop for in-conversion and fully converted organic livestock producers is due to take place on Tuesday 4th May, 2004, at Loughry Campus, Cookstown.

The theme for the event, which arose after consultation with representatives from the organic dairy and beef and sheep sectors, will be: Organic Markets 'your niche – our business'.

The workshop, which aims to help organic producers in Northern Ireland map their future will be led by Helen Browning OBE (Eastbrook Farm) and Maitland Mackie CBE (Chairman, Mackie's of Scotland).

Topics will include identifying and expanding organic market opportunities, supplying a consistent product to meet consumer needs and how to get a better return from the organic supply chain. Invitations to producers will be sent out in due course.

For further information contact David Neill, Supply Chain Development, DARD. Tel: 028 9052 4124 or e-mail: david.neill@dardni.gov.uk.

## Recycling farm plastic

A local non-profit making buying group is expanding its operations so that its plastic re-cycling service can become self-financing. A main aim of Lecale Group Ltd is to supply and recycle plastic bale wrap at very competitive rates and to make it easy for farmers to comply with new EU packaging laws which will come into effect in October.

For more information contact Patrick Magee on 07711 725941

## Effect of clover on breeding sheep

White clover generally causes no problems in breeding ewes at tupping time but pastures which have a high content of red clover can result in a lower lambing percentage due to compounds in red clover that mimic natural oestrogen.

Mixed pastures with up to 20% red clover in the dry matter are unlikely to cause problems but a pure stand of red clover can reduce ovulation rate by up to 30% and increase the number of barren ewes.

However, the effects of short-term exposure to red clover (a few weeks grazing) are temporary, and by grazing ewes on grass swards for 14 days before mating there should be no residual effects. Even grazing for as little as one week on non estrogenic pasture is definitely worthwhile.

Ewes tupped on red clover will still ovulate and show oestrus but more of them will fail to conceive probably because there are changes in the cervical mucus impeding sperm passage, which prevents fertilisation.

Modern varieties of red clover have been bred for low oestrogen content so there is definitely a place for these varieties on the farm. Both conventional and organic farms have achieved good lambing percentages, on swards with a moderate content of red clover owing to its high feed value and ability to flush ewes.

Article written by John Vipond, SAC Sheep Specialist

## Organic potato trials

Without access to modern fungicides and limited, restricted use of copper sprays, organic potatoes are at risk from blight. In both 2002 and 2003 the Greenmount Organic Unit grew trial plots of selected potato varieties both for assessing their ability to resist foliage and tuber blight, and to produce potatoes acceptable to consumers when grown under organic management.

The work was led by Applied Plant Sciences Division, DARD (NI Plant Testing Station) in conjunction with Glens of Antrim Potatoes.

Varieties grown in 2002 were Remarka, Sante, Milagro, Valor and Orla. Results showed that some of the varieties showed good resistance to tuber blight despite having foliar infection.

Varieties grown in 2003 were Remarka, Sante, Milagro, Orla, Milva and Lady Balfour.

It is too early to give conclusive recommendations, but work to-date has indicated that Orla and Milva may be useful choices for organic production in addition to the widely grown Sante and Remarka.

It is intended that this work will continue for a number of years with varieties selected for blight resistance and which show commercial potential.

Related work at Applied Plant Sciences Division, DARD (Newforge Lane) emphasised the need to assess both tuber and foliage blight resistance, and showed that copper oxychloride did give some blight control.

## On our farm – Raymond Pollock reports on Thornyhill farm

Raymond Pollock farms 96 hectares at Thornyhill Farm which is located between Londonderry and Strabane, on the banks of the River Foyle. This dairy farm completed conversion to full Organic status in September of 2002.

Since then we have been fully dependent on clover / grass swards assisted by a few light dressings of separated liquid slurry, for all the grazing and winter fodder requirements for our 130 dairy cows and followers. Stocking rate for the farm is 1.81 LU per hectare.

Grazing swards receive three dressing over the season each comprising 14,500 litres per hectare (1,300 gallons per acre) of separated liquid slurry. The first dressing is applied mid March, the second mid/end May, the third mid/end August. Separated liquid is absorbed immediately into the ground leaving no residue and no damage to the grass / clover sward, nor the clearly visible abundant worm life activity.

Two cuts of silage are taken at Thornyhill, the first cut around the first week in June, the second in mid August. Cutting ground is a mixture of white and red clover / grass leys. 22,000 litres per hectare (2,000 gallons per acre) of separated liquid slurry are applied per cut. Average yield for the two cuts is around 20-22 tonnes per hectare (8-9 tonnes per acre).

Our experience of growing and managing grass / clover has been interesting. Done correctly, an abundance of grass for grazing and conservation is achievable. We have made mistakes, and are now hopefully learning from past errors. Our first attempt at growing red clover was bit of a disaster, due to it being sown much too late (17 Sept 2001).

Red clover needs to be sown mid July / early August. On the two fields sown in September red clover growth was very poor (approx 10% in patches here and there) yielding two very poor cuts of silage. Having considered ploughing and re-seeding we decided to apply a dressing of separated liquid slurry in the spring 2003. This resulted in an amazing recovery with full growth of red clover / grass, yielding two very heavy crops of silage. Another dressing of liquid slurry was applied after second cut providing good re-growth, which provided a lot of grazing late into the autumn. Both fields are now looking good.

Greenmount Campus, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Horticulture and Plant Breeding Station, Loughgall and Barenbrug UK, are monitoring a demonstration field sown out at Thornyhill. Two types of grass were sown along with a white clover blend, one to give an open sward and the other to give a close dense sward. Looking at both swards it is very difficult to differentiate one from the other. Grass growth and clover content of both swards are checked and measured on a regular basis and results are being monitored for the third season. Both sward types stand up well to grazing, recover well, and provide a large quantity of lush grass for livestock.

Weed control on grass / clover grazing leys is achieved by regular topping, done in front of cows grazing. This gives good weed control with the added bonus of a good thick close sward avoiding stemmy grass and long growth around dung pats.

Before reseeding, a forage crop or stubble turnips is harvested and then re-ploughed providing for a better seedbed.

At present we have some grass / clover leys out now for six years which are still grazing very well. One ley, now in its fourth year, and mostly used for cutting, is beginning to get rather weedy due to not being topped on a regular basis.

Overall we are very happy and pleasantly surprised at the ability of grass / clover to provide for all our grazing and winter fodder requirements.

## Greenmount Unit update

Following an inspection by the Soil Association, full-symbol status was awarded on 28th March. As a result our full rotation will come into operation. It actually consists of three separate rotations suited to the three land types on the Unit.

### Crops

With full-symbol land we will be planting, hopefully in mid-April, a hectare of commercial ware potatoes split equally between the blight resistant varieties Sante and Orla. Sante is an established variety, and Orla, grown in trials on the Unit for the past two years, has proved to be very acceptable despite being a first early variety.

The ground is coming out of red clover and will also receive a dressing of manure prior to ploughing. Stone and clod separation is an important part of seedbed preparation, aiming to provide a fine even tilth which helps produce tubers with high skin quality for the pre-pack market.

This year we will be again growing spring barley, peas and lupins, hoping for a good summer to allow us to attempt to combine and crimp the peas and lupins as a protein grain crop. If this is not possible then we will ensile them as previously.

Last year's potato/cereal field (O'Neill's Middle) was sown with forage rye in the autumn. It established and grew very well and is now feeding the ewes prior to lambing. It retains nutrients and controls weed growth.

The Road field grew cereals last year, and after combining was direct-drilled with a grass-clover seed mixture. The clover appears to have established well and survived the recent frost and snow.

### Swards

Red clover swards are starting to grow as the weather slowly warms up.

### Sheep

All sheep were dosed for fluke using a product which is effective against immature fluke in October.

On the 5th November ewes were split into two groups with half of them going to the Lleyn ram and the remainder to a Texel.

The ewes were scanned and (including 2 barren ewes) the predicted lamb crop is 189%.

The ewes grazed forage rye from late February until 15th March when they were housed and concentrate feeding started. They are being fed an 18% CP home mixed ration at a rate of 0.5 kg per day. The ration comprises 675 kg home grown rolled oats, 100 kg full fat soya, 100 kg praire meal, 100 kg flaked peas and 25 kg sheep minerals. All ingredients are non GM and the bought in straights are not organic. Big bale silage is available ad-lib.

On the 11th March a homoeopathic nocode programme to prevent enzootic abortion commenced.

Shortly after housing one ewe took twin lamb disease. She was administered glycerin plus a combination of a homoeopathic remedies, and has fully recovered. Lambing is due to commence on 1st April, although the first ewe has given birth to healthy twins on 22nd March. This year's lamb crop will have full organic status.

### Cattle

Cows and calves were housed in November. Pregnancy diagnosis was carried out on cows after housing with 23 of the 25 cows being confirmed in calf. Based on continuous monitoring of trace elements using blood profiles selenium and iodine levels are still not at optimum levels which may explain the barren animals and a rather extended calving period.

Cows have been given homoeopathic nosodes to prevent Leptospirosis and BVD. Cows are due to start calving in early May.

Calves have been creep fed 1 kg per day of a 16% CP ration using home grown barley and peas, full fat soya, praire meal and minerals.

Calves are to be weaned on 24th March and concentrate feeding will be stopped in early April. These calves have had full organic status since 28th March.

**Environment**

During the autumn 280 m of new hedge was planted using a range of nature mixed species. Plastic sheeting and quarry dust were used to prevent weeds becoming a problem.

**Research**

Applied Plant Sciences Division has a number of trials on the Greenmount Unit.

The spring barley and wheat trials examining the effect of mixed variety planting, and the spring barley trial to assess weed competition, will be repeated this year.

**Open Day**

**Make a note in your diary for an Open Day on the Unit.**

**Thursday 29th July is the date, with tours *starting* between 1-4pm, and 6-7:30pm.**

## Horticultural job vacancy

Willowbank Organic Producers Ltd in Dungannon seeks to appoint a full-time Manager and part-time Support Worker for an organic horticulture project.

The company has a strong commitment to quality organic production, and the inclusion of people with disabilities at all levels within the company is also an important part of the ethos.

For further information contact Patricia Cushley at Willowbank Community Resource Centre, Carland Road, Dungannon, BT71 4AA, Tel: 028 8772 2821 ext 3860.

## On a lighter note

**Bats prefer organic farms**

Research has shown that bat activity was over 60% higher on 24 organic farms in England and Wales compared with matched conventional farms. One species was only recorded on the organic farms.

For further information see *Journal of Applied Ecology, volume 40, pages 984-993*.

## Web watch

A selection of recently discovered web sites or sites with new content

**Note:** DARD accepts no responsibility or otherwise for the content of non-DARD sites.

**University of Aberdeen Organic Website**

http://www.abdn.ac.uk/organic/

**Centre for Organic Seed Information**

This database of organic seed availability is managed by the Soil Association and is the recognised source of information on organic seed availability for use when sourcing seed or requesting derogations.

http://www.cosi.org.uk

## What's on ?

**Animal Health Plans Meeting**

Wednesday 14th April 2004, 7:45pm
Greenmount Campus, Antrim
Information from David Alexander - 028 9442 6614
david.alexander@dardni.gov.uk

**Mastitis Workshop**

Thursday 15th April 2004, 11am
Information from David Alexander - 028 9442 6614
david.alexander@dardni.gov.uk

**Organic Farming - R&D Conference**

20th – 22nd April 2004, Harper Adams University College
Information from British Grassland Society
Tel: 01189 318189

**Slurry – its value and potential – Demonstration and Trade event**

Wednesday 21st April 2004, 2 - 7pm
Greenmount Campus, Antrim

**Introduction to Organic Production – 2-day course**

Tuesdays 27th April and 4th May 2004
Greenmount Campus, Antrim
Book a place through Charlene - 028 9442 6704

**Organic Workshop on 'Organic Markets'**

Tuesday 4th May, 2004
Loughry Campus, Cookstown
further information contact David Neill, Supply Chain Development
Tel: 028 9052 4124 or e-mail: david.neill@dardni.gov.uk

**Sucklers, sheep in a new environmental (non-organic)**

Thursday 1st July, 1-8pm
Greenmount Hill Farm, Glenwherry, Ballymena
Information from Norman Weatherup Tel: 028 9442 6762

**'Open Day' – Greenmount Organic Unit**

Thursday 29th July 2004, tours ***start*** between 1-4 and 6-7:30pm
Information from Adrian Saunders - 028 9442 6765
adrian.saunders@dardni.gov.uk

# Organic Bulletin

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- Raymond Pollock
- Adrian Saunders
- John Vipond
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